

### REMARKS

Applicants request favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application in view of the preceding amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 23-30 are presented for consideration. Claim 23 is the sole independent claim. Claims 23-26 have been amended to clarify features of the subject invention, while claims 28-30 have been added to recite additional features of the subject invention. Support for these changes and claims can be found in the original application, as filed. Therefore, no new matter has been added.

Applicants also request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action.

Claims 23-27 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,224,679 to Sasaki et al. in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,413,664 to Yagi et al. Applicants submit that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach many features of the present invention, as previously recited in claims 23-27. Therefore, this rejection is respectfully traversed. Nevertheless, Applicants submit that independent claim 23, for example, as presented, amplifies the distinctions between the present invention and the cited art.

Independent claim 23 recites an exposure apparatus for exposing a wafer to radiation via a mask. The apparatus includes a process chamber in which the wafer is exposed to the radiation, a load-lock chamber including first and second gate valves, and connected to the process chamber via the first gate valve, a booth connected to the load-lock chamber via the second gate valve, a transfer mechanism configured to transfer the wafer from another apparatus,

different from the exposure apparatus, into the load-lock chamber through the booth, a first gas flow forming mechanism configured to cause clean gas to flow through the booth and across a path of the wafer in the booth, during the transferring of the wafer by the transfer mechanism from the other apparatus into the load-lock chamber, and a second gas flow forming mechanism configured to cause clean gas to flow through the load-lock chamber, during transferring of the wafer by the transfer mechanism from the other apparatus into the load-lock chamber.

Applicants submit that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach or suggest such features of the present invention, as recited in independent claim 23.

The Sasaki et al. patent shows a processing system that includes a cleaning chamber 14 and a load-lock chamber 13. The processing system further includes a ventilating fan 20, a high-performance filter 21 and a chemical filter 22, which are provided for the cleaning chamber 14. Applicants submit, however, that the Sasaki et al. patent does not teach or suggest at least the arrangement of the first gas flow forming mechanism and the second gas flow forming mechanism of the present invention, as recited in independent claim 23. Specifically, the Sasaki et al. patent is silent with respect to a gas flow forming mechanism configured to cause clean gas to flow through the load-lock chamber 13 in the manner of, for example, the second gas flow forming mechanism of the present invention recited in independent claim 23. Accordingly, the Sasaki et al. patent fails to teach or suggest at least a second gas flow forming mechanism, as in the present invention recited in independent claim 23, which is configured to cause clean gas to flow through a load-lock chamber and across a path of a wafer in the load-lock chamber, during transferring of the wafer by the transfer mechanism from the other apparatus into the load-lock

chamber. Applicants further submit that the remaining art cited does not cure the deficiencies noted above with respect to the Sasaki et al. patent.

The Examiner relies on the Yagi et al. patent for teaching a process of exposing a semiconductor wafer to light via a mask as one of the processes used in preparing a semiconductor wafer with a pattern. Applicants submit, however, that the Yagi et al. patent, as with the Sasaki et al. patent, does not teach or suggest the salient features of Applicants' present invention, as recited in independent claim 23, which have been discussed above. Namely, the Yagi et al. patent also does not teach or suggest at least the arrangement of the first gas flow forming mechanism and the second gas flow forming mechanism in the manner of the present invention recited in independent claim 23. Accordingly, Applicants submit that the Yagi et al. adds nothing to the teachings of the Sasaki et al. patent that would render obvious Applicants' present invention, as recited in independent claim 23.

For the foregoing reasons, Applicants submit that the present invention, as recited in independent claim 23, is patentably defined over the cited art, whether that art is taken individually or in combination.

Dependent claims 24-30 also should be deemed allowable, in their own right, for defining other patentable features of the present invention in addition to those recited in independent claim 23. Further individual consideration of these dependent claims is requested.

Applicants further submit that the instant application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action and an early Notice of Allowance are requested.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010 All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steven E. Warner", is written over a horizontal line.

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